

My View



FRED EMMERT

Like the galaxies in space, the memories of World War II and of those who served recede with time at an ever-increasing pace. James Michener was right when he wrote, "In time they like the men of the Confederacy will become strangers. Longer and longer shadows will obscure them, until their Guadalcanal sounds distant on the ears, like Shiloh and Valley Forge."

It is now some 50 years from those days, and surely my memories have dimmed. Details are seen with less clarity now. A time-driven fog has set in. Yet some memories linger ever bright, and I suppose they will to the end. Matty, my navigator, filled with Boston Irish cockiness and wit; ever-reliable Haddock and Smitty; Hogan, my copilot, who (bless him) was a teetotaler and thus assured me of a second shot of whiskey handed out by our flight surgeon after each mission. And of course there were others. One does not easily forget those times on the Pacific tolls with them. Memory is also jogged by writers like John Muirhead and Samuel Hynes who describe eloquently what it is like to do battle in God's high heaven.

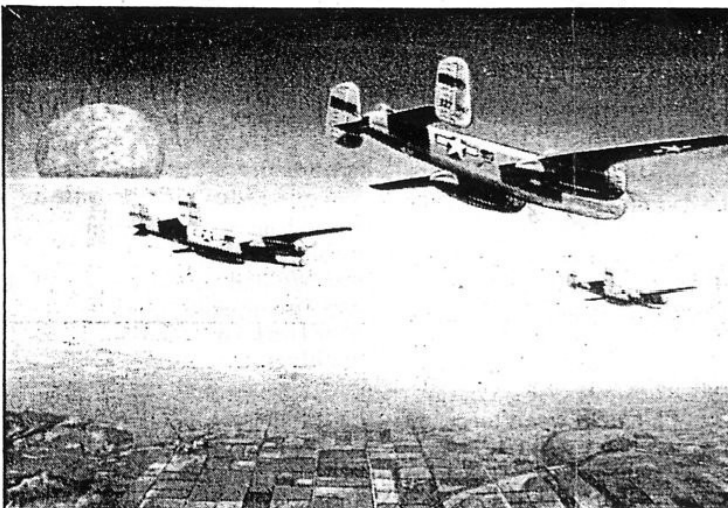
Everyone, so they say, has a look in him. If I were com-

pelled to undertake the challenge, I imagine it would revolve around those years. Each mission held a tale. And I would undoubtedly dwell a bit on one particular day when I saw history stagger and start down a new and dimly defined corridor.

It all happened near the end of the war. With each campaign our B-25 bombers moved steadily westward across the Pacific expanses, atoll by atoll, until we finally reached Okinawa. From there we flew mis-

abruptly changed. Our primary target for that day was canceled without explanation and a secondary target was assigned in its place. Instructions were further given that under no circumstance were we to fly near or approach what had been our original target.

We lumbered north at 8,000 feet that morning, my solid-nose straffer B-25 latched to the wing of Dennison's glass-nose ship, with Hibler on the



This Fred Emmert painting shows an atomic bomb cloud rising over Nagasaki, Japan, in August 1945 — as he remembers seeing it from 60 miles away.

sions over China and over the home islands of Japan itself.

Briefings on this one particular mission followed a pattern which had long ago become routine. Those for the full crew were held the evening before the mission, and a second briefing for the pilots and navigators was held the morning of the mission. All this was done in a very mechanical and well-worn cadence. Yet during the final briefing on this one August morning the pattern

other wing. This was our regular flight formation — a V in a larger formation of V's. We had flown this pattern many times under many circumstances, and a great trust had developed between us. The weather was clear that morning with a normal scattering of cumulus clouds. The patchwork of rural Japan moved steadily below us as if it were on a conveyer belt and we were suspended motionless above. The formation was loose to conserve fuel. No

enemy fighters were expected, but if they did appear we would close ranks fast. Flak was not anticipated until later over the target. All seemed normal and in order. But the events of that morning were hardly normal.

I did not see the flash which must have occurred in the sky some 60 miles to our north-west. But what I did see was impressive enough. A dirty, gray eruption spewed forth into the sky, and as I watched, it grew ever larger, gaining rapidly in breadth and ascending straight upwards until it spilled into the stratosphere. Churning and writhing, it was awesome in its size.

Radio silence was no longer required on the return leg to our base, but we flew in silence. We had witnessed something incomprehensible and were lost in our private thoughts.

The date was Aug. 10 (on that side of the date line). The answer to it all was not long in coming. During debriefing we learned that a new device (an "atomic" device) was dropped on our primary target of that morning. Much of Nagasaki no longer existed.

Fred Emmert of Storrs is a research professor emeritus at the University of Connecticut. His work centered on the biological aspects of nuclear fallout. During World War II he served as a combat pilot in the 48th Squadron, 41st Bomb Group, 7th Air Force, in the Central Pacific Theater of operations. Emmert submitted a wartime photo to be used for his My View portrait.

CITY FLIERS SEE NAGASAKI BLAST

From 70 and 250 Miles
Away They Watch Flame

Two Cleveland airmen, one flying over Yaku Island, 250 miles away, saw the Nagasaki atom bomb blast, the United Press reported from Okinawa yesterday.

Lieut. Col. Edward F. Roddy, 26-year-old ace of 9117 Connecticut Avenue S. E., was among Mustang pilots over Yaku. He told Richard Harris, United Press correspondent, that he saw a great ball of yellow orange fire shoot 8,000 feet into the air over Nagasaki, followed by billowing clouds of smoke.

Closer to the annihilating explosion was Staff Sergt. Michael Haddock, 919 E. 232d Street, Euclid. He was 70 miles away, a radio operator and gunner on a Seventh Air Force B-25 attacking Kanoya Air-drome.

Sergt. Haddock said a column of smoke rose 20,000 feet from the blast and flame.

"I could still see the smoke when we were 100 miles away, heading for home," he said.

Mothers of the two fliers last night said their sons had been expecting the war to terminate about the end of the year.

Col. Roddy had written: "It should be over in about six months, but don't expect me home before next July."